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Many books have been written about the Holocaust, films have been produced, documentaries, discussions on television, etc. It is known that most of the survivors are getting very old, or have died in the last decade. Very few of us are still on this earth and we have the duty, each of us to add our personal stories to all the previous writings.

This memoir is dedicated to many people. First of all, to our granddaughter, Danielle Snyderman, who insisted we put in writing our life in Europe before the Second World War and our story during the war, and then our life in the United States. Without her prompting, we would have postponed to go back into memory lane and actually start remembering what happened over 50 years ago. Also, this memoir is dedicated to our wonderful children Liana, Elaine, and David, whom we didn't tell exactly all our hardships and tragedies because we wanted them to grow up in this wonderful free country without burdening them with our sad story. We were different from other parents who did not come from Europe after the war. This is also for Michael and Sasha, our other beloved grandchildren. And of course to the memory of the six million Jews: some were our parents, our relatives, and our friends, brothers and sisters.

After the nightmare you try very hard to start a new life, in the beginning you almost succeed, you try to be like everybody else around you, you have to settle in your new country, learn the language, make a living, bring up your children.

Occasionally you have nightmares. You dream you are running from somewhere to an unknown place, you are lost, you can't find a certain street in a strange city, and you are alone. There is no familiar, only strangers around you, you lost your address, you can't find your hiding place. You are in a state of panic.

This is not going to be only a sad story, there are many incidents where there is a triumph of human spirit, goodness, involvement, help from friends and strangers, and most of all, the will to live.

I was born on February 11, 1924, in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. My father, Bernard Katz, was from Budapest Hungary. He came to Zagreb as a young man and married my mother Luuba Schwartz. I was the youngest child. My sister Nada was three years old when I was born. My father was married previously in Budapest, had a son, Zoltan, and after a few years around 1929, he came to live with us in Zagreb.

After the first World War, Yugoslavia was a kingdom ruled by Alexander ~~Kanatoritevic~~ KARADJOREVIC. There was religious freedom. Four religions were observed. The Serbians were Greek Orthodox. The Croatians were Roman Catholic, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was a group of Muslims, and the 4th religious group was Jews, mostly living in the bigger cities. In schools we had compulsory religious instructions and each group of children went to the instructions to which religion they belonged. The Jews in Zagreb were mostly Askenazis, not strictly observant. Very few households had kosher kitchens. We went to the temple for Saturday services, which was part of the school curriculum. We observed Rosh Hashanah, fasted on Yom Kippur, held seders on Passover. We Jewish kids had an organization called MACABI, where you were involved with sports- gymnastics was one of the major activities, and I participated since my 6th year. I really loved it and I think this was the beginning that developed my love and interest for ballet.

Our school friends were from all religious backgrounds, although socially, we had more Jewish friends than gentiles.

Going back to King Alexander, in 1934 he was assassinated by a group of Croatian rebels and his young son, Peter, officially became the new king. Since he was still under age, his uncle, Prince Paul, became the regent king.

The first 14 years of my life I would consider more or less normal; a middle class Jewish family, very much assimilated in the every day happenings of the city of Zagreb.

My father was a merchant in wood, at that time the houses were heated with wood, there were stoves in every room of the apartment and winters were quite cold. He had his ups and downs in business but we always had a nice apartment, delicious home cooked food. The recipes that I use now and my grandchildren like so much go back to my mother's cooking. We always had a maid who cleaned and cooked. We also had a German governess for a while so that we could learn to speak German. It was very important to learn foreign languages especially German and French. We also learned French from a Russian lady who escaped from Russia after the Russian Revolution.

In high school, both languages were taught, unfortunately English was not yet. It would have been a great help to me if English were taught; it would have helped a lot to start a new life in the U.S.A.

The summers we spent mostly at home going every day to the river SAVA, 15 minutes by train, there we learned to swim and we played in the sand like children do today all over the world.

In the 1930s there were very few cars around, no one that I knew had one. There were a few motorcycles, people walked a lot and took the train, called a tranvai. When I was a little girl, maybe 5 or 6, and somebody asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I always said I want to be the person who sells the ticket on the train.

Of course there was no television, but radio was a big thing, we listened always to classical music, and the radio station from Budapest, my father's city, where there was always gypsy music.

We read books, saw our friends, played different games, went to the parks, the life was centered on the family and we had dreams for the future.

In the middle of 1930s we heard our parents discuss political situations, especially in Germany where a man called Hitler was in power and in his speeches he was openly very much against Jews. Since through history there was always anti-Semitism, no one took him seriously. The general opinion was he wouldn't be in power too long. How wrong they were!

We young kids did not pay any attention to politics. We lived in our safe little world and never even thought about any perils.

I believe sometime in 1938 German and Austrian refugees stared to show up in Zagreb. Some of them were wealthy Jews who started to see the handwriting on the wall and came to Yugoslavia to wait for visas to South America and the U.S. Then there were some poor people who left their native countries (Germany and Austria) with small children without any money. The Jewish community in Zagreb tried to help them out by providing shelter and arranging for them, especially children, to have one meal a day, in a Jewish home. My parents also volunteered and once a week we had 2 little girls, maybe 8 and 10 years old with us for lunch, what was in Europe, the big meal of the day. I remember I felt very sorry for them, but I could not really associate that we will also be refugees one day. My father said how sad it is that these people had to abandon everything that was dear to them, their careers, homes, and friends. He said this will never happen in Yugoslavia. We are good citizens, never did anything wrong and will be safe here for the rest of our lives.

With the clouds hanging over our heads; about the political situation in Germany and myself being a very sensitive and introverted child and entering into my teenage years, I was in a very depressed mood.

Some of my girlfriends discovered boys and started to flirt and have dates, but I wasn't interested yet.

So I had to find something that would occupy me. My big love was classical music especially Chopin and Tchiakowski (~~sp?~~). We also had a very good opera where we attended performances at an early age. The most famous operas performed mostly Verdis and Puccinis and the famous operettas were very much in vogues, especially Lehar's work like Merry Widow Strausse Flerdemuse (~~sp?~~) and many, many others. FLEDERMAUSE

I loved them all, and to go see this performance was like the biggest happening, only the anticipation when I knew we had bought tickets for a week in advance was exciting.

In most of the operas and all of the operettas there was a lot of ballet. And when I saw these nice looking girls, sometimes on their toes, moving graciously with the music, I thought this was the most beautiful art and should be a wonderful satisfaction letting yourself be guided by the music. I wondered if I would be able to do these artistic movements. ORLOVA

So at the age of 14, I enrolled in a ballet school run by a Russian lady, Madame Oslova. She was a soloist in the opera ballet. The art of ballet in Zagreb was in Russian hand; all the artist that escaped from Russia during the Russian Revolution settled in different European countries.

Since at that time, no nice girl from a good family took ballet lessons and wanted to become a dancer, I didn't know how to go about to pay for the lessons. I couldn't go to my parents; they would definitely not approve of this nonsense.

My sister, Nada, who was at that time 17 years old, and made some money tutoring kids in some school subject. She said she would pay for the lessons. I believe Mdm. Orlova held lessons twice a week in the afternoon after regular school was over and I couldn't wait to get to the studio and start dancing.

After a few lessons, I really loved it more than I thought I ever would. This was strictly Russian style ballet, which suited me perfectly, but I also heard there is a new movement in dance that was called modern dance.

The studio that Mdm. Orlova rented was actually a modern dance school run by Mrs. Maletic. She was the modern dance pioneer in Zagreb, influenced by the German new movement and probably the U.S.A. new modern dance by Martha Graham. Of course I joined her studio so I was really in my glory spending all this time learning about this (to me) new art form. My thoughts were always on the dance subject, dreaming about that one day I will be on the stage.

After a few months of studying, both my teachers had the highest praise for me and they thought I was a natural talent. With all these extra activities, I still went to regular school, but now all my friends were several girls that I met in ballet and modern dance classes and we had a lot in common because most of them were just as much devoted to the dance as I was.

After about 6 months of study, the modern dance school had an informal performance in the studio and I was also chosen to participate. Mostly we danced Yugoslav's national dances in national costumes (~~see pictures?~~)

Then I was chosen for a solo dance, also in national costumes, for another performance on a different stage. So it slowly happened that the performing bug bit me.

Finally my parents realized that I was serious about this art form and didn't object. I think they had bigger worries with the political situation all over Europe and the talk of a war all around us.

My ballet teacher Mdm. Orlova also said that I should soon be ready for the Zagreb Opera Ballet. But this was only a dream because I had to finish the regular school first.

In Sept. 1939 the World War II started. At that time we still didn't realize that it would spread all over the world. We did see more Jewish refugees arriving from Germany and Austria. We had a cousin in Vienna. Our father's brother lived there, his daughter was about my age but we never met her. Then we heard that England is taking Jewish children into their country to save these children from the Nazis. We heard from our father's brother that she left for England with a group of other children and that she was safe in England. Since England was an enemy country for the Germans, she couldn't write her parents directly but she was able to send the letters to us in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was still not occupied by the Germans and we were able to send her letters to her parents in Vienna. After the war, we never heard if the parents survived, probably not and we also never heard from the cousin in England. Her name was Hededy. HEDDY

So life went on in Zagreb, in my little world between regular school and dancing with very little change.

Some wealthy Yugoslavian Jews started to leave for America. But these were very wealthy Jews, maybe 10 families altogether. For us just thinking about America was like imagining today going to the moon.

And again, why should we leave our country where we were born?

And then on April 6, 1941, the Germans marched into Yugoslavia and the nightmare started.

I will try to go slowly on the events following April 1941 to the end of the war in May 1945.

Looking back now, it was only four years, but at that time it seemed like forever.

Soon after the invasion of Germany, the Croatian pro nazi puppet government came into power. Right away they started persecuting the Jewish population. Big posters appeared on every street corner with regulation for Jews. We had to wear yellow stars that had to be attached in front of our clothing and in the back. I wish I could have saved the stars for future mankind, but running away from Yugoslavia, we couldn't keep any evidence that we were Jews and we always had some kind of false ID papers. So it wouldn't have been very smart to have anything in our possession indicating we were Jewish. The patches were bright yellow with a Jewish star in the middle. It was very demeaning to walk around with this identification. Most people did not pay too much attention to us; at least I didn't have any unpleasant encounters. Some other individuals did. The punishment for not wearing the stars was severe; at least imprisonment and possible death.

We still were allowed to go to school but we had to wear this stigma all the time. The second restriction was that we couldn't walk on certain streets mostly in the center of the city. The third restriction was that we had to be home by 9 P.M. Anybody that was found on the street after 9 P.M. was to be shot. Then the USTASHAS, the nazi (____?) police force, started to take the USTASHAS best apartment that belonged to the Jews. They gave people 24 hours to move out with just a few personal belongings and find other shelters. We were lucky in this respect, no one came to throw us out from our apartment. Then the German occupational government asked for money and jewelry from the central synagogue in Zagreb. The Jews again thought this would help to ease the situation so they gave and gave but nothing got any better.

The next step was they started to round up young Jewish boys from ages 15 to about 20, for so called labor on certain military roads. They all went because they were told it would be just

for a couple of months. Of course that was the end of them. They never came back. They were all killed eventually. A lot of them were boys that I went to school with or knew socially.

We didn't notice any food shortage yet. Some items were harder to obtain, like good meat, but as far as I remember we had everything.

In those days, the housewives went to the big market everyday. There were no big refrigerators. There were so called icebox where the iceman brought ice every day and we had big pantry rooms. They were situated in the coolest spot in the apartment and there we had a supply of non-perishable foods. But fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and meat were bought on a daily basis.

Another law was enforced stating that Jewish households could not employ maids. Since almost every Jewish family had at least one maid, now all these people lost their jobs. Of course this was not the biggest tragedy not to have help in the house but again it was clear that the new regime could tell us anything and we had to obey.

The regular school year was coming almost to an end, sometime in May, and all the Jewish kids were given report cards for that school year and we were not able to finish until the end of June what was the normal time when vacation started (?). I was able to keep up with dancing in all the school I attended and this was a blessing for me since I wasn't so interested in regular school subjects.

In July 1941, our friends with parents(?) started to leave the city realizing that there is no hope for us Jews under German occupation.

My good friend Maya Newman, her sister and parents, and I just happened to be passing by in the street they lived. I stopped in, everybody was nervous. They were leaving behind the grandfather who was too old to attempt the escape. He was crying knowing that he will never see his family again. I was very sad and upset seeing all this, also because my very good friend since early childhood, Maya, was leaving.

Next day I heard that the Lisoringers (sp?) Lewingers, also my very dear friend, Nada left with her family. Our whole world was falling apart and we were still not thinking about leaving ourselves.

My dear ones, how do you write what happened so many years ago? It was in late September 1941 when the bell rang. I went to answer and there was a man asking where was our father. He said he has orders to take him along. Mother was at the market and Nada was home with me.

Father was still home and when we told him what the man came for he was very calm, got very pale and picked up a few possessions we all had prepared for a little bag with some food, toothbrush, etc. in case the police would come for all of us.

The parting was sad but we never thought that this was it and that he would never come back again. We again thought this was a temporary situation.

Now came the worst part, how do we relay the news to our mother upon her returning from the market?

Nada ran to our brother, who at that time lived in his own apartment hoping that he might be able to do something to get father out of prison. I was left alone to tell mother what happened. I will never forget her anguish and desperate crying when I told her that father was taken away.

The same day we found out where all the men were congregating. It was a big place where they were holding annual commercial fairs. We were able to go to visit and bring some food at lunchtime. I even remember what the dish was: boiled beef in a tomato sauce, the sauce was made kind of sweet and sour. From that day until today I could never again eat that particular dish.

Anyway, we saw him, I believe for two days and the third day when we came no one was there anymore and we found out they took the whole group to a concentration camp called JASENOVAC.

We never heard from him again. And after the war we heard from a few survivors that he died a few months after his arrival to the camp.

After his departure the new government put a person called commissar to run our business. My mother, who was helping to run the business, was not allowed to continue. The man took all the money from the business we were promised to get some money every month, but never saw a penny.

At the same time that father was taken away, our uncle Richard was also arrested. He was a bachelor and lived with our grandmother Rose, our maternal Grandmother. Of course Richard also died in the camp. Our grandmother was at that time 80 years old but in very good shape physically and mentally and a very good looking lady. * see bottom of page

We also had relatives in Belgrade (the capital city of Yugoslavia) where our mother's sister Regina lived with her husband Max and 3 sons. Max was a well-known journalist. The sons were several years older than us girls. Two of the sons were involved with the Zionist movement to go at that time called Palestine, the future state of Israel. They believed already in the middle of 1930 that the only way for Jews to survive is to have their own state. So the 2 younger sons, Kamilo and Freddie left for Palestine as young boys still in their teens. Of course the parents were very upset, they didn't want to part with their children and they had different plans for them. The 2 boys went with a large group of young people who believed in building the future state of Israel. They still live there. Kamilo who became Ruben Dafni (his last name was Kant previously), became a very well known Israeli politician, he was the consul general in the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, ~~__~~?, Kenya and now retired. He is the chairman of Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. Freddie became Efra Dafni, had an important position in building Israeli economy and lived in retirement near Tel Aviv.

When they arrived in Palestine, they first became farmers and lived in different Kibbutz until the founding of the state of Israel.

The third brother, Rudy, stayed in Belgrade. As a child he was very sick, had tuberculosis of the bones and had a very bad limp. He also became a journalist like his father. Got married to a Viennese girl, Eva and they had a son. Before the Germans came to Belgrade they bombed the city and a lot of people perished but the family survived the bombing. When the Germans occupied the city, Max and Rudy immediately took off. ~~Twice~~ they were very well known as ~~the~~ anti Nazis, Aunt Regina, her daughter in law, Eva, and the boy (Sasha who was about 4 years old) stayed behind. The second day after the occupation, the Germans rounded up all the remaining Jews: men, women, children, and shot them. Among them were Regina, Eva, and Sasha. We found that out after the war.

Now, going back to Zagreb and our lives, after they took away father and of course we were very sad and upset but re really thought he would be back soon and somehow life went on.

That was in September 1941, school started for other children but we were not allowed to attend. This would have been my last year before graduating from high school.

I was 17 years old. The fact that I couldn't finish school didn't upset me too much.

I was doing a lot of dancing, trying to take lessons everywhere possible. I just didn't want to give up everything. I guess it was also an escape from reality, the world was so ugly and tragic, and this art kept me alive and sane.

* grandma Rose was taken by cattle cars to Auschwitz a few month after we left Zagreb. After the war we found out from one of the survivors, who was with her in the same wagon, that she died on the train before arriving to Auschwitz. She was 81 years old

Going back to August 1941, I heard that 2 choreographers and dancers, husband and wife, Anna Roje and Oscar Harmos were engaged for the Zagreb opera and ballet for chief choreographers and dancers. There were dancers at the famous Ballet Russ of Monte Carlo, formed by Diageilef, a Russian emigree. All the dancers were also from Russia, trained in the famous Russian ballet schools. They left their country after the Russian revolution and most of them settled in Paris.

Since the war was starting all over Europe, Anna and Oscar were probably glad to accept this position in the Zagreb opera. They were looking for young, talented dancers. The Opera ballet was old fashioned. They had a lot of old stale dancers, their idea was to introduce a lot of modern ballets and reorganize the ballet company.

Through Madame Orlova, my teacher, they heard about me and they were very much interested to meet me. I was very excited but had a lot of reservations, knowing that no Jewish girl could join the Zagreb opera. Anna and Oscar were probably not aware of how bad the situation was for the Jewish people in Yugoslavia.

Nevertheless, we met. They liked my dancing. I don't remember if I auditioned or just joined a regular ballet class. They told me when the opera opens in the fall, I would be a member of the ballet. I was ecstatic, couldn't believe my good fortune and was counting the days to start the new season.

When the time came to start rehearsals, I met Anna and Oscar in front of the theater and they told me they didn't realize how bad the situation was against the Jews and they couldn't hire me. I felt like my whole life fell apart all over again. Now what do I do? I couldn't go to school. I couldn't dance. We didn't hear from father, life was getting very hard. We started to feel also that everybody we knew left Zagreb or was taken away by the Germans, but we were still waiting for a miracle.

Grandmother lived alone, now that Richard was taken away. We wanted her to come live with us but she preferred to stay in her own apartment. She knew if she leaves her home somebody else would move in, she also lived in hope that Richard would come back soon.

Our brother Zoli (Zoltan) came to live with us. For some strange reason, he was not registered as a Jew, maybe because his mother in Hungary was a gentile or it was a mistake in city administration, everybody was recorded in city hall from birth with his her religious background. He was drafted into the army and after Yugoslavia was invaded by the Germans, he was still considered part of the army. He was able to get a lot of groceries and especially meat. It was getting to be hard to obtain good quality of meat, bread, and several other food items. Somehow with his pay and our meager savings, we were able to survive.

We had a lot of gentile friends who were trying to talk us into leaving Zagreb. They said there is no hope for us here, they would have helped us to cross the border somehow, but we still didn't have the courage and the will to leave everything and go to face an unknown future.

One day in the beginning of October (1941), I met Anna and Oscar. The opera season had stared and apparently they didn't have enough good dancers, and we stared to talk and they asked me to come to the theater the next day, they will try to do everything possible to enter me for the ballet season. With all my heartaches, I was in seventh heaven all of a sudden, I couldn't believe my good fortune that I would be really able to be part of the ballet company.

Next morning, I went to the theater. We had an hour of class right away. This was the usual procedure, every day you had to have at least one hour of practice at the bar and then in the middle for different combination of steps.

After the class, there were rehearsals for different operas that had also ballet, and they were also rehearsing for an evening of ballets. No one asked me any questions, they gave me some parts to learn, first for the new ballet, Tchaikovski's 5th symphony called Life. I love the music and the part I was learning to dance. This symphony remained until this day part of my life, every time I hear it, it is like my life motif. They told me that after the first performance, if everything works out well I would be a paid member of the opera ballet.

The night of the first performance came. I remember wearing a pink waltz length dress, the make up was done by the theater make up person, the theater beautician did my hair, I really looked great. Finally, my part in the ballet started. Of course it was a group dance, I felt very comfortable and relaxed. After the dance was over, Oscar and Anna congratulated me. I could tell they were really impressed with my debut and I knew I was going to be a part of the Ballet Theater. This first performance was the beginning of October and the next two months I was performing in Operas, operettas, ballets, had classes every day and learned a lot.

The Jewish situation was bad, people were fleeing Zagreb, trying to get to occupied territories by Italians, a lot of them were taken away by the Croation Pro Nazi government. From father, we didn't hear and I just guess I buried my head in the sand and went on with my life in the theater.

Late in December, after being in the theater for two months, our friends (non-Jewish) started to tell us to leave Zagreb, they knew more than we did. All the Jewish people will definitely be taken to camps; we should leave as soon as possible. For us, it was still a big decision, how do we get out of Zagreb? Everybody who wanted to travel had to have special documents to leave town or the frontiers and Jews were not given permission to leave. Our brother Zoli, who was in the army still, said one day that we have to leave as soon as possible. He was working on it to get us permits to leave Zagreb and get some contacts with certain people who were helping refugees (for steep fees) to cross the border to Slovenia. The Italians occupied Slovenia. They were more human and trying to protect the Jewish refugees.

So we finally decided to leave. I was heartbroken to leave the theater. Mother was heartbroken to leave grandmother alone, but at her age she couldn't attempt to leave for an unknown destination. We were afraid of the unknown, of uprooting. But we had no choice if we wanted to survive. We waited now to obtain the permits and all the arrangements for the escape.

My last dance performance was very sad for me. Nobody but Anna and Oscar knew I was leaving, in those times you couldn't trust anybody and I just left quickly without saying goodbye to anybody.

We started to be nervous about leaving. They were rounding up all the remaining Jews everyday, the last few days we moved to our gentile friends, the Hugls. Their daughter Zdravka was my school friend, she was a talented piano player and had a beautiful soprano voice. Her parents were not really close friends of m parents but we lived next door to each other. Just before the war they moved to a different part of town, they asked us to come to stay with them. I want to point out that in those terrible times there were brave people who sacrificed their own safety to help other people. The punishment for hiding Jews was severe. Prison at the least or death by firing squad. I believe we stayed with them for about 3 days. They fed us, although the food situation was bad, but whatever they had, they shared with us. We left a few of our possessions with them. I don't recall exactly what but it couldn't have been much because we really didn't have many valuables.

When I went back to Europe from the U.S. in 1966, I went to Zagreb. The trip I will describe later. I went to visit the Hugls to thank them for what they did for us. They said it was

the natural thing to do, to help friends, also they started to tell me that whatever we left with them (our possessions) they couldn't keep. They wanted to explain to me why and how. I said I didn't come for anything that was left of ours in Zagreb and I don't want to hear what happened and who took it. I came to see them and thank them for what they did for us. Of course, I brought presents for everybody.

Finally, Zoli got the official permit for us to leave. It was arranged that we got by train to a certain small town, where we will be picked up by a guide and taken to the mountains to a peasant's house. We went to grandmother to say goodbye, mother was very upset, of course, to leave her all alone, but it was a question of saving our lives and come with us or staying with grandmother and the mother's love prevailed. Again, this was the last time we saw grandmother.

It was the beginning of January 1942. I don't know exactly what day. Zoli came with us in his USTASHA army uniform. We had our passes and everything went smoothly. They checked our documents but a man in uniform accompanied us. They didn't ask too many questions. We traveled without any suitcases, only what we wore since it was winter we put on several layers of clothing. After a few hours we arrived to the village where we were supposed to have somebody waiting for us. Two men were there. Zoli told them to take good care of us and returned back to Zagreb by train. Again, this was the last time we saw him. Several moths later, we found out that they took him also to the concentration camp JASENOVAC where he was killed. We thought that one of the reasons he was discovered was that a woman who was a courier for Jewish refugees from Zagreb to Ljubjana, bringing money from different sources to Ljubliana was also bringing some money from Zoli to us. At her last trip that she was supposed to bring some money and jewelry, she disappeared and denounced to authority in Zagreb all those who were sending possessions to Jewish refugees.

Now we were at the station with those 2 unknown men. They took us into the mountains to an isolated peasant's house. It was a large family with a lot of youngsters and grandparents. They had a large kitchen and several beds in the same room. An old man was in one bed with a broken leg. At night they put me to sleep on the floor next to the old man who was snoring loudly and spitting constantly on the floor right where I was lying. Now, when I think about it, it is funny, but believe me, it wasn't funny when it really happened. Nada and Mother, I believe, slept in a bed. There were also in the same room aside of the whole peasant family, 2 other ladies, and refugees from Austria, who were also trying to escape to the Italian side of Yugoslavia. In the evening, everybody had dinner together. We all got a spoon but no plates. A couple of bowls with food were put in the middle of the table and everybody was supposed to dig into the bowls and eat. I never saw the way peasants ate, without plates, and my appetite, if I had any, left me quickly. At that time, I didn't realize, I guess I wasn't that hungry yet, that if you are hungry you will eat under strange conditions and you will eat food that you really don't like very much. Also, in the evening, one of the guys from the local police came. We got very scared thinking they discovered our clandestine escape. But he said he only wanted to see if we arrived and if we are okay. What he wanted was some money even if he didn't come out and say so. We gave him a certain amount and he left.

The next morning around 3 A.M. we were supposed to be ready. A horse drawn carriage (note: no cars were around, or a just a few in the big cities). Two guys were waiting for us, we piled up in the open carriage, the 3 of us and the two Austrian ladies. We were dressed in winter coats, hat and gloves. The temperature must have been below freezing point. It was January and winter was severe, a lot of snow. We must have been driving through the mountains for several hours, all I remember that I was never so cold in my whole life, my fingers and toes were frozen

and I thought I would not survive this trip. Finally, we arrived to a small train station where the two guys just dropped us in front of the house of the master of the station. They told us this is how far they were supposed to take us. I think we paid them the fee for this clandestine trip in advance.

We were completely frozen from the severe cold and wind. Our extremities were numb and I believe this was the beginning of the ~~first~~ frost bites (?) we suffered all through the war, the fingers were especially bad.

Now, the 2 Austrian ladies and the three of us knocked on the train master's door. The lady that came to the door was his wife. She let us in the house seeing in what condition we were in; we were all frozen to our bones. I think she gave us breakfast and then the train master came from the back, probably knew our story from other refugees that he helped. He said, he himself in his uniform would take us the same afternoon by train to Ljubliana, Slovenia, which was occupied by Italians. We should put scarves on our heads and one of his daughters would come with us. We should be pretty safe with him and if at the control point anybody asked any questions, (they probably won't he said, since they know him) we would tell them that we are his daughters and mother is an aunt and we are visiting some relatives in Ljubliana. He said he can only take the 3 of us, since the 2 ladies didn't speak Yugoslav, it would be too risky to take them along as relatives.

Later on we found out that the 2 women took the train on their own, were caught at the border and sent back to German occupied site and probably finished in a concentration camp.

We arrived in Ljubliana without any problems. We said goodbye to the train master and his daughter who did all this to save us for no monetary reward. I think we gave the daughter one of our rings that we had taken with us. Later on when we were settled in Ljubliana, they came to visit us. Again this behavior showed that there were people who were helping complete strangers in times of terrible distress without any ulterior motives.

First we went to an inexpensive but decent hotel where we took a bath and settled in with our meager possessions. It was a cold January but nothing like the trip over the mountains.

Somehow, we found out where all the refugees from Zagreb could be found. They all met in coffeehouses in the afternoon. Nobody had comfortable living quarters, the meeting place was in a warm coffeehouse where for very little money you could get a cup of coffee even read the daily newspapers, and exchange ideas and sad stories with fellow refugees. We knew we had to find a place to live, we couldn't stay in the hotel room for a long time. We were trying to find a room in a private home with the use of a kitchen so mother would be able to cook some meals. We had to watch the money we were able to take along, not knowing how long this situation would last and what the future without any money would be.

All of a sudden we were homeless, no meals were prepared like at home. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were taken for granted. At home, everything was running in order for 17 years or as long as I remembered and now we were displaced and didn't know where our next meal will come from. We couldn't go to regular or more expensive restaurants and slowly we knew what to be hungry really means. We met with other people and those who lived here already a few months told us where to look for private accommodations, where to eat cheaply.

After a week or two, we found a place to live with a widow and her son, a little out of the center of the city, so the rent was cheaper. Ljubliana was a very nice city, capitol of Slovenia. The people were very pleasant but spoke a different language from what we spoke in Zagreb, so we encountered the first language barrier in our future years of travelling. Although, the better - educated people also spoke Croatian or Serbian (the language we spoke) sometimes we had a hard time communicating. We also learned a bit of Slovenian but most of the people that we had associated with were from Zagreb.

Then I started to look for ways to continue my dancing career and find schools where I could take lessons. Luckily, my good friend, who was also a dancer, Mira Sanina, was in Ljubliana. She just got married to a very well known dramatic actor. She was a very good dancer, and had studied already in England. She was also Jewish. Her husband was gentile, but escaped also. She was already known as a dancer, having had her own dance recital just before the war. She was a few years older and took me under her wing. We practiced together, then found a school of modern dancing similar to the American Martha Graham style. The owner of the school was very kind. She let me study with group without paying, since she knew that I was a poor refugee. Also, after the lesson was over she always took me into her kitchen and fed me, usually bread with jelly and a cup of tea. It came very handy because we could always use some extra food.

So, in a way, we settled into our new life. Mother was trying to feed us the best she could. The war was going on, there was very little food around to buy, only on the black market for much higher prices. Nada, to make a little extra money, took a job watching a little boy also from a refugee family. I don't think she was too happy with the job but it brought a little extra money. This was the pattern through all these hard years. I was in a dream world trying to go ahead with ballet and Nada was trying to bring in some money. I didn't know Mother's feeling at that time, but she was probably worried how and if we are going to survive. We heard no news from Yugoslavia, the refugees in Ljbuliana were trying to be transferred to Italy. It was known that the Italian government was taking in Jewish refugees from Yugoslavia and placing them all over Italy in small towns as civil prisoners of war. A lot of our friends were very anxious to leave Ljubljana since it was only an occupied territory and settle in Italy. We didn't like the idea of being prisoners of war and we felt kind of safe at the moment but were told that eventually all the refugees will have to leave Ljubljana and the Italians will transport them to Italy.

In the meantime, all the refugees were looking for anything that was possible to get for free. We heard that a catholic priest was giving some money to the people in need. You had to make an appointment and state your needs and why did you had to leave your home. So Nada and I did succeed in going to his home. We explained that we are Jewish refugees without money. He was very nice and understanding. He gave us a certain amount of money and served us tea with bread, butter, and marmalade. The Catholic Church was aware of the plight of the Jews, couldn't do much for them, but at least they helped a little bit with small amounts of money.

Then we heard that (I believe it was) the Red Cross, opened a free kitchen for refugees for lunch. We joined it eventually, first we felt very strange about it not being used to getting free food like really poor people but then all our friends joined it; people that probably had more money than we had. The food was awful. They gave us some kind of meat with gravy and polenta. Polenta was made out of corn meal. This was the poor people diet. Most of Yugoslav peasants ate that, even in normal times. The only good food was the bread. We were only given one slice. The rest of the menu I don't remember, just that everything tasted terrible to me, at that time I didn't eat much of what they gave us.

The winter was severe, but then spring came and at least we didn't suffer from cold. Sometime in March somebody told me that the Opera Theater is in need of dancers. I went there and they were very happy to engage me. We danced mostly in operas there. Ballet was part of the entire opera. One, I remember very well, it was the dances from Faust by Gounod, there was a long ballet called Walpurgians Nights and I enjoyed the dancing. I made some friends in the theater, most of them were very nice to me. I probably got paid. I don't remember if the money I

earned amounted to much. I wasn't interested at that time in money. I only wanted to dance and get more experience dancing on stage.

Slowly, our refugee friends were leaving Ljubljana for Italy as civil prisoners of war. I had no intention to leave, since I was part of the ballet but our papers were going to be processed eventually, because the Italian government was trying to place people all over Italy.

We heard from Zoli through this woman who was a courier bringing information and money to people from Zagreb. He sent us some money and letters that he was still fine and heard that father was still alive in Jasenovac concentration camp. Then we heard that the woman courier was supposed to come again but she never arrived to Ljubljana. Later we heard that she took all the money she was supposed to bring for herself and denounced to the Zagreb police everyone was helping the Jews in Ljubljana. Since Zoli was one of them, he was also sent to Jasenovac concentration camp. We heard from somebody that father was still alive when Zoli arrived so he knew that mother and the two of us were safe in Ljubljana and going to Italy. When and what exactly happened to them we don't know. We heard that father died shortly after Zoli arrived and Zoli was shot by the Ustashas.

Sometime in August 1942, the Italian authorities called us to the headquarters with the news that our trip to Italy was arranged. We were sent to the province of Bologna. Bologna was a nice city, cultural and known for the best Italian cooking. We were supposed to travel to Bologna, go to the police headquarters in Bologna and from there we will be told where to go. It was usually a small town where they send the refugees. I was sorry to leave Ljubljana but we couldn't postpone our trip any longer.

So we left one summer day with our documents as civil prisoners of war or internees.

The train ride from Ljubljana to Bologna took a whole day. As soon as we crossed to the border of Italy, everybody of course spoke Italian, the language we didn't know. Now we felt even worse. Previously we could at least communicate with people, now we really felt like strangers. Nada, who was even then very friendly toward people, started to talk to some Italians who were in the same train compartment. She used her high school French to make herself understand and she claimed that she learned Italian on the train from Ljubljana to Bolgona. I was completely mute, so was mother. We arrived to Bologna toward the evening, took a room in a small hotel near the train station, put our meager belongings that consisted of two suitcases in the room and went around the center of the city. I fell in love with the city, the people, the elegant women, even though the war was going on, the city was lively, only when it got dark, there was no electric light anywhere. During the war the lights couldn't be on because that would have given the enemies targets to bomb the city. I remember we had dinner in a nice little restaurant, we felt like treating ourselves well, we didn't know what the next day is going to bring. We returned to the hotel after dinner. Now I recall that whenever we slept from the day we left Zagreb to the end of the war, we always had a double bed for the three of us and I was always positioned in the middle since I was the smallest one. Many times there were 2 beds next to each other and sleeping in the middle wasn't very comfortable. I remember sleeping like on a board feeling the edge where the 2 beds were joined.

The next morning we were going to the police station called in Italian Questura, where we had to report our arrival to Bologna and to get instructions where we will be sent.

The building was in the center of the city, there was a department for refugees. The persons in charge were very polite. I don't remember how we communicated in Italian, probably with our high school French and Nada's meager knowledge of Italian. They told us we are being sent to a town called Vergato, about 20 miles from Bologna. We were supposed to leave the same

day and there to report to the head of police called in Italian, Il Marshallo di Carabinieri. We took the papers for our transfers to Vergato. It said on the documents, "civil prisoners of war."

Again, we took our 2 suitcases from the hotel, took the train to Vergato. In about an hour, we arrived. Vergato was a pretty little village surrounded by hills and there was a river going at the edge of the town where one could swim. I didn't see the beauty of the town at arrival because I wasn't happy to be interned in a small strange town in Italy, instead of being free and working on my career. Many years later I went with Nada to visit the two towns we lived in during this period and then I first realized how charming Vergato was.

Upon arrival, we went to the one and only small hotel, checked in, had lunch, and went to report to the head of police. The man we met seemed to us at that time very strict. We didn't realize that he didn't really know why we were interned. I don't think he ever met a Jew, he probably thought we must have done something politically against fascism. We tried to tell him the only crime we committed was that we are Jewish. On top of it, he had two sons who were catholic priests. He was also very religious, told us to go to church and pray.

Later we found out that at our arrival, he didn't have yet the documents from the higher authority about us. After a few days, he spoke to us again much nicer, in a fatherly way, told us about our restrictions. The restriction for being interned was that we couldn't be out of the house after dark, had to report every day to the police station, and couldn't leave the town without permission. He said if we obey the rules, he will be like a father to us. At that moment, the whole misery, our flight from one place to the other, not having enough food, our shaky future, hit me and I started to cry bitterly.

Then we went to city hall to find out if we can rent a room with kitchen facilities. We couldn't stay in a hotel forever. The man that spoke to us was very nice and gave us an address to go to where the people wanted to rent a room. The village was small and the apartment we looked for was right around the corner. The lady took us in right away, her sons were in the army so she had a room available and could use a few extra liras. She also had a daughter by the name of Eda, who worked in a Fiat factory in Bologna and commuted every day from Vergato to Bologna. She told us she had to ask her daughter first if she could take us in. The next day we moved into her apartment and became very friendly with Eda and when we were transferred after a while to a different village, she came to visit us often and brought us food.

Again we picked our 2 valises from the hotel and moved in with Eda and her mother. The same evening around 10 P.M., we heard music and singing from inside of the house. We went to the window, looked out, and couldn't see anything. As I mentioned before, there was no light permitted during the war. The songs were beautiful, male voices. We were puzzled by all this, but Eda explained that the young man from the village saw us and thought we were beautiful girls, also for them mysterious foreigners, called straniere and that why they came to serenade us. Of course, we were thrilled by all this attention.

Strange, but I can't remember what the apartment looked like, what our room consisted of. It must have been very small. Soon we moved to a different place that I remember well and I remember most of the places we lived during these years, we the wandering Jews.

In the meantime, we started to speak with young people from the village, they all wanted to form a friendship with us. I think they were curious about us, the foreigners. We went swimming every day to the river, slowly started to learn the language. For me it was very hard to in the beginning. I had some books in Italian and every day I wrote sentences and learned how to read and write. It was harder to understand people. To me it seemed they all spoke so fast, but this

happens in every language that you don't understand and try to learn. After a while I was able to communicate. I believe it took about 2 months. Food was scarce, we got like everybody else in Italy, coupons for food for a whole month. Food was rationed and you could buy it only with these coupons in the store for a regular price. Of course on the black market you could probably buy anything but we certainly couldn't afford high prices. Especially meat was impossible to get. Bread was also rationed, we always said when the war is over we will buy tons of bread, good quality, and eat it forever. The bread that was baked at that time was made of different ingredients, like chestnut, corn, and who knows what else.

The Italians didn't eat potatoes, they liked pasta and rice. After a while when we got friendly with young people, they brought us potato. Also we met people that had orchards in the vicinity and they invited us to pick fruit. According to the season, we picked peaches, some of them were the size of a grapefruit, sweet and juicy, then we picked figs from the trees, and in late August the grapes were ripe and we picked those and ate them with delight. Mother was busy trying to cook as good as possible.

After our first day with Eda and her mother we were called to the chief of police. Nada and I went. Mother couldn't speak a word of Italian, so we said there is no reason to bring her along. When we arrived we saw right away that he was very friendly. He told us he got all the information about us and since we were telling the truth he will be very good to us. The rules were 1. we had to report to the police station every morning 2. We couldn't leave the village without his permission 3. We had to be home before dark and stay indoors. All these rules were later eased up. We didn't report every morning, in the evening we went to the movies and for walks like all the other villagers. If we wanted to go to Bologna for the day we needed a permit. Since we wanted to visit the "big city" occasionally, the only way we could do it was to get a doctor's certificate that we needed a specialist in Bologna. So we found a nice young doctor in Vergato who gave us a letter that said we had to go to Bologna to see a different doctor.

After a long conversation with the chief, I still don't remember how we were able to communicate in Italian. He started to ask us about our father, relatives, our school, and how we feel about being interned in Italy. Finally, I broke down and again started to cry bitterly. I just remember that all these months of hardship and running around the world triggered something in me and I just couldn't stop crying. He was very understanding and with his soft Italian heart he probably felt for our troubles and us. From that moment on, we never had any problem with him and were really treated well. When we left I told Nada not to tell mother about my crying, I didn't want her to know that I was so upset since I knew she already worried plenty about our survival.

In a way life went smoothly, as normal as possible under the circumstances.

We didn't even have a radio where we lived. Since I was dying to listen to music, and people in the village started to know us a little better and our background, a lady took pity on me and let me come to her house every day from 1 P.M. to 2 P.M. to listen to classical music. Sometimes we listened to the news, the war was in full swing. The Italians were reporting their victories, so were the Germans. Of course we couldn't listen to the allied news (the Americans and English) so really didn't know what was going on.

Since many books have been written about World War II, I am not here to report the history of the war. I only want to describe my story, my life, and my feelings.

The days went by slowly, we tried to keep busy learning Italian, my study of ballet was impossible, there was no space to practice and somehow I didn't have the desire to dance without music or teachers to guide me. The summer was still good, we were able to swim, made friends with the young people, and even went to the movies. I think they had performances only on

Saturday and Sunday. They were showing Italian movies only. We were very anxious to get letters from our friends in Yugoslavia, our gentile friends. There were no Jews left there. Occasionally we got a letter, we were really homesick for our city, our way of life, and our friends. and every letter was opened and censored.

We went to Bologna a few times with the doctor's certificate for an imaginary illness, roamed around Bologna. In the afternoon, we had to report to the police station, they just put a seal on our papers and didn't ask any questions. Once they told us that we are getting too many letters and for security reasons they had to return the letters to the senders. We were very upset, receiving mail was the only link with our past.

The summer suddenly turned to fall. There was a big movement of Italian army going to the Russian front. All of a sudden, Vergato was the center of soldiers training for the Russian invasion. We met a lot of young men, mostly lieutenants, these young fellows all perished in Russia. They were not adequately prepared for the severe Russian winter and tremendous amount of snow. After 6 months of our internment in Vergato, the authorities told us we are being moved to another village called Minerbio. The reason we suspected was because so much military movement. I still don't know why did they think we should be sent to another place, but this was war and I guess they thought we would spy for the allied armies.

So again we packed our belongings, took the train, and arrived at Minerbio. Compared to this village, Vergato was a metropolis. There was nothing there for us, one street in the middle of the village with a few stores and the usual coffeehouse, where only men came together to drink espresso and chat. Women stayed home and took care of the children. We went to the police station to announce our arrival, no one there was very interested in us, I really don't remember who spoke to us, they said we have to find our own accommodations. There was no hotel in the village, so we went to the one and only coffeehouse and asked if they would know where we could rent a room. Since in Minerbio probably nothing much happened ever, we were probably a big attraction; 2 young girls with mother. By this time, we had no problem communicating in Italian. I think all the men came to the coffeehouse and after a while somebody told us that a family named Cantelli has a room for rent. One young fellow, Renato Cantelli came to talk to us and took us right away to the apartment where we rented the room with the agreement to use the kitchen. Everything was very primitive. The bathroom was an outhouse; I mean the toilet. There was no running water; you had to go to a well to get water for drinking and washing. For cooking you had to use coal on an open fire. The room consisted again of a double bed and you must guess by now who slept in the middle. If there was any other furniture in the room, I don't remember, but there must have been a closet for our few belongings.

There were several sons in the family. Only Renato lived at home with the mother. One son was in the army, one son was a shoemaker living separately in Minerbio, the fourth son was married and lived across from us with his wife and three kids. One daughter lived in Ethiopia, in Africa. This was an Italian colony, and here husband was a high ranking fascist and had a good position there. Renato was very good to us, introduced us to a lot of young people and again we made friends. I think our money was running low, we lived as modestly as possible, we had to pay rent and buy food. Food, again, was a big problem, as the war progressed (&) it was harder to get food and like I said before, the monthly coupons were not much. But we didn't know that we had it pretty good because later on when we had to leave Minerbio and hide from the Germans in Bologna, it was much worse.

We got a monthly allowance from the government. I think the money came from the American Jewish Committee (&) to be given to the refugees. Whatever the amount was, it

wouldn't mean much now almost fifty years later, but we were able to pay for the rent and food. Nada was bringing in some money tutoring children in French from the few wealthy habitants and also working sometimes in an office.

There was a small bookbinding and printing plant in the village and they offered us a job putting pages together, building books. They brought everything that was needed to our home and when we finished, they picked it up. The pay was probably minimal, but it kept us busy, there was not too much to do in the village and the money came in handy. It was winter, pretty cold. The apartment must have been heated because I don't remember being very cold there. That came later when we had to run again.

The American and English airforce were bombing the Italian cities, Milano had heavy casualties and several parts of the city were destroyed. Bologna wasn't spared either and we heard from Minerbio, the village was about 20 miles from Bologna, the bombing, the planes passing, and it sounded like heavy thunder. We came to Minerbio in early January 1943, after the cold winter, spring was here again. Everything looked better in the spring, we started to visit Bolgona again. One of my admirers loaned me his bicycle, and I guess Nada also got a bike from somebody. Bologna is a beautiful city. There was so much to see and we felt like part of the big city and not like peasants in Minerbio.

Through friends from Minerbio, we met some young people from Bologna. They were politically against fascism and were working secretly in the Italian underground. There was a big movement of Italian partisans who were trying to get rid of Mussolini and the Germans and they were in touch with the English and the Americans. This one couple we became friendly with, Diana and Giorgio, later on when we had to flee from Minerbio gave us an empty apartment in Bologna where we were able to hide for several months before our departure to Milano.

The food shortage was getting worse. We survived on bread, pasta, vegetables, fruit, and a lot of potatoes.

Once, our admirers, two guys, took Nada and me on a date to another village, where they were able to obtain a good meal, not in a restaurant but in some peasant's home. They made a feast for us; homemade pasta and steaks. Everything was delicious but later on I got sick in my stomach, had terrible cramps. After not eating meat for quite a long time, my stomach wasn't used to a regular meat diet, or maybe instead of beef, it could have been horsemeat. Horsemeat was very popular during the war. Also, just came to my mind, eating rabbit was a very well known dish in Italy, even now you can order rabbit called "coniglio" in the best restaurants. The difference was though that we heard rumors after the war that those rabbits were actually cats. I don't know if that its the truth but one thing I know you couldn't find any cats roaming the streets in Milano.

Again, spring turned to summer. The money was scarcer and we heard that a warehouse is hiring young women for work in the fields and warehouses. There was not much to do in Minerbio. Time didn't pass quickly, we felt if we keep busy the end of the war will come quicker. Plus, we could always use the extra money. So we applied for the job and we got it right away. We first worked in a warehouse full with potatoes and onions. We were supposed to select and divide the good potatoes from the ones that were spoiled and then put the good ones in big bags. About at least, the weight was 50 pounds. The same we worked with the onions. When the sacks were filled, we loaded them on a cart and then the load was taken to the railroad tracks where empty wagons were waiting for the potatoes and onions to be put on the train. I remember the bags were very heavy, in pairs we took the bags and swung them into the wagon. Somehow we didn't mind the work, the only terrible thing was the odor of the spoiled potatoes and onions. It

smelled to high heaven. The women we worked with were mostly from the same village, young peasant like women. They befriended us right away, only one was very cold toward us since she new we were Yugoslavs, and her young husband just died as a soldier in the Italian army, ambushed by the Yugoslav partisans. She was left with two small children and was constantly crying. We were trying to explain to her that we had nothing to do with the Yugoslav army and that we were also victims of this war. After a while, she relented and became also our friend. Mother was very upset that her daughters worked in such menial jobs but we tried to explain to her that we didn't mind.

One day the man that was in charge asked us to come the next day to the field to help pick vegetables from the soil. We went, it was a terribly hot day, and for us city girls standing in the field under the hot sun and pick produce, I think it was lettuce, was very hard and we told him we don't want to do this work anymore.

Again the summer ended, the summer of 1943, I was 19 years old, trying to survive. We were invited to all kinds of happenings that young people tried to organize, the times were bad, everybody had somebody in the family was in the army fighting or already reported dead or missing. We heard that the invasion in Russia was disastrous and a lot of soldiers perished there. But when you are young you still want to live somehow and have a good time. There were plenty of admirers and boyfriends around, nothing very serious. I think this is not very important for my story but eventually I will write about the guys I met and most of them as good hot blooded Italians, they were madly in love. We went to parties where we danced and flirted and sometime in the background we heard the noise like thunder, the allies bombing Bologna.

Then in September 1943, the fascist government with Mussolini as head, collapsed and a general by the name of Badoglio was trying to form a new government and make a pact with the Allies. The war was going badly for the Germans and the Italians. The future looked bad and some of the people in the government started to realize they would lose the war. Mussolini went into hiding, Badoglio took over and tried to get away from the Germans.

When the Germans saw what was going on, they occupied Italy, rescued Mussolini, and Italy was now completely under Nazi rule. Of course this was bad for us, as long as the Italians were in charge, we were protected by them. After all the uproar in the government, we knew we would have to run again. Once the Germans occupied a country all the Jews as soon as possible were rounded up and sent to concentration camps or killed right away. The Cantellis, where we stayed, went to all village meeting and kept us informed of what was going on and what will happen with the internees.

Sometime in October they told us that the Italians cannot protect us anymore, and we should go to Bologna where we were not known. Our friend, Mario Finzi who helped us when we arrived from Ljubliana to Bologna and visited us several times in Vergato and Minerbio, met us in Bologna on our trip from the villages. He was able to obtain false ID cards with Italian names, the place of birth on the false cards was in Bari in southern Italy, the south was already liberated by the allies, so no one could check back to the city of Bari if the ID cards were true. We were also offered to go for the duration of the war to live in a convent as nuns. We would have to dress as nuns and do everything like pray and stay in the convent all the time and work like the rest of the nuns. Only the mother superior would know our true identity. By that time we spoke Italian fluently, only mother of course, didn't. It was much harder for her to learn a new language. Now we decided she would not speak at all, we will have to tell everybody that she was deaf and mute. That was very hard for her, because she was an outgoing person and loved to talk to people. Now we had to decide what to do: go to the convent for the rest of the war or try to get to Bologna and

from there up North to Milano and possible cross the border to Switzerland where some people had taken refuge.

After thinking it over we decided we would try Bologna. Nada and I didn't feel like being nuns, not for any religious reasons, only we figured it would be very lonely and uneventful life, and we felt that life is passing us by. A lot was said after the war that the Catholic Church didn't do much to help the Jews. All that I have to say, we were offered refuge in one of the convents near Bologna. It was risky for the convent to take in any refugees. The Germans occasionally inspected many convents because they knew that the nuns were hiding anti fascists and Jews. Many times the Nazis found people in the convents took them away, and the nuns were also punished.

Our friend Renato came back from the town meeting and advised us to leave as soon as possible. We got in touch with our friends Diana and Carlo who were working for the underground and we asked them if they could find us a temporary place to stay in Bologna. We couldn't go to a hotel since whenever you wanted to rent a room you had to register and show your identity card. Since ours were false, there was always a risk to be discovered, plus money was scarce, we couldn't spend any for hotel rooms.

Somehow we heard from Diana that there is an apartment available in Bologna where we could stay. The owners of the apartment left. The whole area around was bombed. It was near a factory that made parts for war materials so the whole area was continuously bombed. The house where the apartment was located was the only one still standing and not a soul was living there. Diana told us there was no heat in the apartment but otherwise it was furnished and we could stay there as long as we want.

Now when I think back how we arranged all these moves is beyond me. There was no telephone in our apartment at Cantellis. I don't remember any public phones and probably only businesses had telephones. Somehow we got the address where to go in Bologna to pick up the keys and get the address where we are going to stay.

Again the 3 wandering Jews packed the 2 valises and left by train from Minerbio to Bologna. Mother was very nervous and scared that someone will stop us and ask where we are going. We saw some Carabinieri (Italian police) on the station's platform, but they didn't ask anything. Arriving in Bologna, we went to the address that was given to us by Diana. There were 2 people also hiding form the Germans, a middle aged man with his mother, I think they were German Jews. We slept there one night and the next day Diana came with the keys and took us to our new hiding place.

The apartment was in a completely deserted area, all the rest of the houses around were completely destroyed by bombs. The apartment was simply furnished but we were able to live there. I believe there were 2 bedrooms and I was able to sleep in my own bed after a long time. The only bad thing was that it was very cold and there was no heat whatsoever. I remember going to bed fully dressed and using irons that we were able to keep warm up on the gas stove in the kitchen and ironing the sheets and ourselves to get warm. There was also a shortage of gas so they gave gas twice a day for an hour or two to be able to cook. The food situation was disastrous. Since we lived now illegally I hiding, we didn't even have the ration cards for the month. That wasn't much but at least it helped for a while. Also, the monthly contribution from the government we couldn't collect since we were in hiding.

There was very little food left in the stores. Bologna was like a ghost city, because everyone who was able to do so, left, because of the heavy bombing. We were able to buy some bread and pasta, all made from some strange flour, but we were hungry and it tasted good. There was a small bar-restaurant near us still open where you could buy a plate of pasta or soup. Then

the owner stared to ask too many questions like where we live and where we come from so we stopped going there.

The worst was the bitter cold, we were always freezing, couldn't warm up and we had frostbites on our hands and feet. Our friend Renato from Minerbio came to visit us before Christmas and brought us some food. We were very happy to see him and the goodies came in handy.

A couple of months past by. We decided we couldn't live like this in hiding anymore. Since we had the false ID cards, we decided to take a chance and go to Milano. Milano was a large city, not too far from the Swiss border. Many refugees in the same position we were in crossed the Swiss border and were able to stay in Switzerland until the end of the war.

We decided Nada will go ahead, see the situation in Milano, find a place to live, then mother and I will follow. Again, after about a week, Nada, let us know that she found a small apartment, Milano is safer for us, again there was a lot of destruction from the allied bombing, but it was still a large city. Life was going on, the theaters were open, the movies were showing Italian and German made movies. After being in hiding in a small apartment for at least two months, we were looking forward to a change.

Our friend, Mario Finzi, who helped us on our arrival in Bologna before we settled into interment in Vergato and came to visit us several times didn't show up since the Germans occupied Italy. We know that until this time the Italian Jews were fairly safe. Mario's parents went to live in the country where they had a summer home. He was commuting from the country to Bologna occasionally. Once day as he was walking in Bologna, the Germans stopped him and asked him for his ID papers. The Nazi did this all the time mostly searching young males, especially when the partisans attacked some German units in repercussion (?) they put people in jail and most of the time they finished in concentration camps. This is what happened to Mario. He was taken to Auschwitz and we heard from somebody later on that he killed himself after a few days in the camp by throwing himself onto the barbed wires. He didn't want to live anymore under those conditions. He was a talented pianist, a layer, and a lovely human being. He was in live love with me but I only liked him as a friend.

Many years later I went to Bologna, it happened to be Yom Kippur day. I remembered that there was a synagogue in Bologna. I went to look for it and I found the synagogue and the street was renamed Via Mario Finzi in his memory. This was very touching to me and after all these years the memories came back to me and finally I started to cry and couldn't stop for a long time. But it was a good feeling afterwards like a stone feel of my inner feelings and I felt better about it.

Mother and I took the train from Bologna to Milan. We had our false ID papers and the trip was uneventful. We arrived at Milano railway station, we probably had the address of our new place so Nada waited for us at the station. First we stayed in a house with an older lady from Rome. She rented out her bedroom to us and let us use the kitchen. After, we found a small apartment in the same building(?), very simple consisting of one bedroom and 1 other room with a table and four chairs and cooking facilities and the toilet was in the corridor where everybody lived on the same floor was using it. How we were able to wash ourselves, I don't remember. But once a week we went to a public bath where we were able to take a hot bath and it felt like heaven.

Milano was pretty much destroyed by the allied bombing, but the center of the city was intact. After we settled in the rental room we started to explore the city. We like the city very much. There was still a cultural life. The famous opera La Scalia was bombed and partially destroyed by bombs. We went to the center called Piazza del Duomo, there were several coffee

hoses nearby in a covered arcade called Galleria. We figured if there are any refugees in Milano, we will for sure find them in the cafes. Nobody had a decent place to live so wherever the Jewish refugees were staying for sure you could find them in the coffeehouses in the afternoon.

We did find a lot of people we knew and everybody was giving advice how to survive. Since we lived illegally like in Bologna, we didn't have the monthly ration cards so again we had to buy everything without coupons. It was cheaper to find an inexpensive restaurant, more the cafeteria type where you could get a plate of pasta or soup for little money.

Still in Bologna, when we were interned, we met a Yugoslav girl not Jewish. She had a lot of connections, she lived with an older Italian man just to survive and through him we sold a diamond ring that we had taken along from Zagreb. With that money we were able to survive until the end of the war plus the money I started to earn dancing in Milano. Nada had a job in Milano in an office and all this helped us to pay the rent and buy food.

Now it was time for me to look for some contacts in the dancing world. I found out from somebody where the artists, singers, actors, dancers meet usually around noon in a coffee in the center of the city. I went there and stared to talk to people to find out if there was any job openings for dancers. There were several musicals in the Milano theaters plus there was a short musical review, usually a comedian, singer and dance numbers before the movie. It seems there was a shortage of young dancers. Right away, I got job offers. I wasn't practicing ballet for quite a while so I mustn't have been in very good dancing condition but I looked good and I had a job right away. After all these years, I don't remember exactly the order of my dancing engagement but I danced with several different companies. One was a dance company from Litvania called after the founder Tamara Beck Ballet. They were performing in a Musical Review and 2 girls dropped out. One was very sick with tuberculosis and the other girl left with some man she met. There were 8 girls and 2 male dancers. They hired me right away and one morning I had to learn, I believe, about 5 to 6 dance numbers for the same evening performance. I don't know how I did it but I must have been pretty busy that evening leaning the steps. Somehow I made it through this first performance and I got better every day. The girls in the company were constantly fighting among themselves, fortunately in Litvanian I couldn't understand a word they were saying. They were not very friendly toward me. They didn't like any Italian girls in their company, for them I was Italian. The 2 man dancers were very friendly toward me and after a while I made friends with some of the girls.

After the engagement in Milano, we traveled to Torino, a very pretty city in Northern Italy. We had an engagement for several weeks in the largest theater in the city. We danced our usual dance program and by now I knew all the dances very well. In the morning, we usually took classes that the guys from the company were always practicing with me, the girls were less ambitious. The rest of the day we were free until the evening performance. I had a rented room in a very elegant apartment and I was just content with m life. After the engagement in Torino, we returned to Milano and for a while we were not engaged for any work. The owners of the company, the Becks, had rented a large house on the Lake Garda and they invited me with the rest of the dancers to spend a week there. The lake was gorgeous, beautiful for swimming. We all slept in one large room like a dormitory. They had very nice meals cooked for us every day. The girls got friendlier and we all enjoyed our vacation.

Mother was in Milano with Nada. Nada had a job in an office and we more or less lived a regular life waiting for the war to end. The Germans were starting to lose ground. Southern Italy had already been occupied by the allies. There was a lot of allied bombing all over Italy. Milano was constantly on alert, when the sirens started to blow that was the sign to go to the shelter.

Usually it happens in the late evenings or in the middle of the night and we had to get up, get dressed if we were already in bed, take our few valuable possessions, there were very few and run to the cellar. This was most idiotic when we recall the way the shelters were built. If the house was bombed and the building collapsed, we would have been buried alive in the cellar. There were all the people from the building in the cellar and it would have been a disaster if we had been stuck there.

We always said that we actually had 2 enemies. During the day, we had to watch that the Germans don't discover our true identity and at night we ~~wee~~ were in danger to perish from the allied bombs or being buried alive.

We had no news from our father, Zoli, or any other relatives or friends.

Most of my days were spent taking lessons, dancing in the evening, and trying to get contacts for future jobs. I went for an audition to one of the choreographers from the La Scala opera ballet. She liked me very much as I said before Scala was partially damaged in the bomb raid and the dancers were without jobs. The management was trying to organize opera performances in smaller (?) cities. I was asked to join a group of dancers in a small town, I forget by now, but I remember vividly that we danced in the opera Aida and Carmen. The conductor of the operas who was also the organizer of the events liked me very much and he told the choreographer to make sure to engage me for any opera that he will conduct. Also, it was great as far as food. We stayed in a small hotel and we had our meals there. The owners tried to please us, the big artists from La Scala and cooked delicious meals. I think I ate whatever was put in front of me.

After this engagement was over, somebody from the dancers I knew from this last dance group told me I should join the dancers equity union and with being a member of the union I could get many more jobs. I was a little worried thinking of going to the proper authorities. The union was run by the fascist government. I had my false identity card that I used so far for all my engagement but to go to the higher authority I felt there was a risk. Nevertheless, I was daring, young and maybe too confident but I decided to take the risk.

I went to the office where I was told I would get a union card. All the officials there wore the fascist uniforms. The picture of Mussolini was prominently displayed on the walls in each office. They were very pleasant to me, asked me for my ID card only, no other questions, issued a union card in my false name, and gave me a special card for traveling half price on every railroad as an artist. I still have the card but I don't think it is valid anymore. (very funny! ~~(grandma wrote when looking back!)~~)

Before I left the office they saluted me very nicely in the fascist way raising high the right hand and saying "viva il duce" meaning long live Mussolini. Of course, I returned the greetings the same way. Now the artistic doors really opened. I was asked to join the La Fenice opera in Venice for the spring season. La Fenice was a very prestigious opera house, I believe right after Milano, La Scala and only major singers were asked to sing there. We were about 8 girls from Milano and the rest of the corp de ballet was from the resident Venice opera ballet school.

I left Milano in early April 1944. It was still cold. We took the train from Milano to Venice. It was a long train ride and a hot time, many times the train stopped in the middle of nowhere because of the approaching airplanes, there was always a danger of air raids from the allies, they were trying to destroy railroad tracks so the Germans couldn't transport their troops. We did stop a few times, but nothing really happened.

I arrived in Venice early in the morning with my one suitcase, there as a porter there, he asked me where I was going and I told him to La Fenice and asked him how far it is. He said it

was not far, definitely walking distance. He took my suitcase and we started to walk. It was quite a long walk, at least half and hour, all through narrow streets and small bridges. It was a unique city and I fell in love with Venice in that half and hour. This was only the beginning of the enchanted place that I fell I love even more, later on.

Finally we arrived at La Fenice. It was located in a small piazza. The theater was very impressive from the outside. I entered the side entrance where all the artists were supposed to enter. After talking to the custodian, he directed me to the second floor where the ballet section was, the choreographer (was the same I had on my first engagement in the small town), and most of the dancers. We found private rooms nearby for rent. The rehearsals started the next day. all the well known Puccini's and Verde's operas were on the program. We rehearsed the dances from Traviata, Carmen, Aida, Rigoletto, Mannon Lescaut, Faust by Gound, Giocanda by Ponchelli. In Giocanda, there was a long dance called the Dance of the Houts, which I really liked very much.

I made friends with the dancers, some I knew from Milano, some I met for the first time. The rented room was adequate; we only slept there. We ate in the inexpensive restaurants, the food wasn't too bad but the war was still on, mostly they had soups and pasta dishes, some fish and uneatable meat. I was able to support myself from the salary I got from the opera, and even I had some money left over. In the food stores there wasn't much left to buy. Occasionally, they had shipments of food from who knows where and people stood in line to obtain some. I remember once a bakery had a shipment of cookies, no bread was available, but I was able to buy 3 boxes of cookies. I ate all 3 boxes the same evening.

La Fenice was very close to the Piazza San Merco, the center of Venice. This is a magnificent Piazza with pigeons flying around and several coffees with afternoon concerts. The church is in the Piazza and Duke's Place. If you take a small steamboat called Voporetto it takes you to different islands and to Lido, Venice's fashionable seashore. I saw everything. Of course only during the day; in the evening everything was dark, even the performances were done during the day. The news on the radio was still talking about German and Italian victories. But slowly the knowledge was that the Nazi and Fascist regimes are slowly losing grounds in most occupied territories. Southern Italy was already liberated (~~check dates~~) and we were all patiently waiting for the allies to advance further.

My life in the theater was I guess an escape from harsh reality, but it was wonderful for me to be able to dance in such a well-known opera. This was all what I desired at that moment. I met a lot of famous Italian singers, and we all became one family. No one had much money, even the big stars at that time were not paid enormous amounts of money for their performances so they lived just a little bit better than dancers and chorus singers and orchestra members. Venice was enchanting. We all had one goal: to do the best performance ever. Many times the rehearsals were interrupted by air raid alarms, although they never attacked Venice. After the alarm sound announced the end of the warning, we all went back to our tasks like nothing was happening.

I made friends with many dancers, orchestra members, and chorus singers. We went to the museums in our free time, sat in Piazza San Marco, weather permitting, even organized parties in the evenings after the rehearsals. There was not much romance going on, everybody was trying to concentrate on his/her art, survive the war, and getting enough to eat. There were a lot of admirers. We were young dancers, the Italian men were always interested but it was mostly very innocent courting, no single dates, and just group fun.

The engagement came to an end. I went back to Milano where mother was eagerly waiting for me. Life went on now. I was more experienced as far as getting jobs and I worked on and off

in different musical reviews in Milano and small towns around Milano. Nada was working in an office, mother was busy trying to buy food and cooking. In the afternoon, we always met some fellow refugees, no one knew much what was happening. We certainly didn't know yet about Aushwitz and other concentration camps in Germany and Poland.

Another summer past, by then it was winter of 1944. Nada worked in an office for an Italian company that was selling some kind of parts for different machines. They were also dealing with the Germans who came to buy some pieces for their equipment. They needed more help in the office. Since at that moment I had non-dancing engagement, I took the job, I said it would be only temporary until a dance job comes along. Naturally, I was under my assumed name and I spoke German. I remember that when the Germans came to make some purchases, most of them spoke Italian. They were all higher ranking army personnel. Some time I had to interpret from Italian to German. One particular incident was particularly interesting. A German colonel came to buy some items, he didn't speak Italian or didn't want to speak and the boss called me in his office to speak German with the colonel. We had a long conversation, first about the business, then about different subjects. How it came about that he said that he can recognize a Jew right away, I don't remember, but he insisted that he can, even admitting that in Italy it might be a little harder because a lot of Italians have similar Semitic features. I was even that brave and said that it happened to me that people thought I might look Jewish. He laughed out loud and said, "I am sitting right across from you and I can tell you are not Jewish and don't look Jewish. Believe me, I can recognize a Jew right away." This much for the master race!

In the beginning of 1945, the allies were occupying and advancing slowly to Northern Italy. The winters were harsh, there was no heating in apartments. Most heating came from the gas oven in the kitchen. The oven was on as much as possible, even that was rationed. Certain hours we had no gas. I guess even gas was scarce during the war. The food situation was not great, but better than when we were hiding in the apartment in Bologna. Whenever I was working, I was able to go to restaurants with reasonable prices, or certain cafeterias.

Then finally the awaited day came. Milano was liberated on April 6, 1945; first by the Italian Partisans, and then the allied troops arrived. It was again a big chaos; the victors were rounding up the fascists and the Italians that were collaborating with the Germans. The Italian partisans were informed which young women in Milano were friendly with the German soldiers. They got hold of those they could find, shaved their hair completely, and took them all over the city with signs. German whores, usually they were in their nightgowns. The partisans picked them up at night. People were spitting at them, and shouting obscenities. I felt kind of sorry for them thinking whatever they did maybe because they were hungry and miserable.

Then one day we heard that Mussolini and his mistress Clara Petacci and a few high ranking fascists were caught by the partisans, executed by firing, and they were bringing their bodies to Milano. They were hung by their feet in Piazzale Loretto and for several days people came to see this spectacle. We also went, Mother, Nada, and myself, and again I felt sorry for them. I couldn't feel that sense of revenge like some other people around us. After all I felt, right or wrong, Mussolini wasn't Hitler and we did find protection under fascist government.

Now I can't remember any feelings of wonderful elation. Yes, the war was over, we didn't have to hide anymore, but these five years of misery, I guess left a mark on us. How do we start a new life? Go back to Yugoslavia? If we decide to go back, we would have to live under a communist government.

None of our fellow refugees were moving to other places or countries. We didn't think of America yet, there were probably no visas to be obtained, plus U.S.A. for us was like going to the

moon. All we know about America is what we saw in prewar movies, like Broadway melodies, Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel and movies with Erroll Flynn, William Powell, Myrna Loy, and of course Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney.

Then the sad tiding arrived, concentration camps, we knew by now that father and Zoli didn't survive. Slowly, somehow, the listing of survivors came to Jewish organizations, I think from the Red Cross. No one from our family was on the list.

We got a furnished apartment through some friends, the lady that lived in the apartment was a fascist and she was taken to prison. The apartment was much nicer than the one we lived in since we came to Milano. It had a bathroom and a toilet inside the apartment, a nice kitchen, living room, and 1 bedroom and it was furnished decently. We felt like really rich people, even though it was very modest by any standards. We even had a telephone and this was the biggest luxury.

Summer of 1945 was like a new beginning of life. Even though we were grieving for all our dear ones, we were young, alive, and things were looking up. Mother was sad but was grateful that at least we survived and our whole life was in front of us.

Nada was already working with the American Army offices, and I was asked to join again the Opera La Fenice in Venice. They had performance all over Italy for the allied forces. In Venice, they built a outdoor arena to celebrate the victory and end of the war. The opening night we danced in Aida by Verdi. The scenery was magnificent and hundreds of people were hired as extras to march as warriors, priests, and slaves. There were live elephants for the triophe (?)scene, when the Egyptian army returned victorious, having defeated the Ethiopians.

The English and American soldiers were in the audience applauding and loving the opera. It was the greatest experience for everybody involved.

We were a group of about 10 dancers from Milano, all girls were soloists from La Scala, I was the only outsider. I still kept previous name Mirella Carloni, most of the artist knew me from the previous engagement. We all became very close friends. The weather was beautiful and once in a while when we had no rehearsal we went to Lido, the beach of Venice. You had to take a small boat called Vaporetto in about 15 minutes you were at the ocean side. This is the first time in my life that I saw the ocean and was able to swim in it and I fell I love with the sea and still the love the ocean today.

There was a beautiful luxurious hotel Excelsior (Ø) in Lido. It is still there today. At that time it was taken over by the British and Americans. We were given passes to use the beach there. Since we were respected artists and the army personnel saw us dancing and they were very impressed by us. Especially the English men were always trying to do something for us, the dancers. They were bringing all kinds of goodies from their Px clubs, invited us for dinner many times, never tried to be fresh with us or expected anything in return. They came to the theater when we rehearsed and they were real gentlemen.

One day, mother and Nada surprised me and came to Venice. Nada was already working for the Allies. She was in an English uniform. Mother was very happy to see me. They stayed a few days, mother loved the performances and the girls I danced with. She was happy for me.

There were no hotel rooms or private accommodations to be obtained. The war was over, everybody was travelling after all these war years. The Americans and the English took all the hotel rooms. We dancers stayed in the theater. They made sleeping accommodations in the large dressing rooms for us, two girls in each room. It was great to feel the excitement of the theater day and night and it didn't cost us anything. Mother stayed with me in the same bed and Nada found a room. We were invited to all kinds of parties after the performances, everything was

proper, no one spoke English including myself, but we all had a good time and communicated somehow. After all the starving years, finally we had some decent meals. We were able to also buy bread, fruit, cold cuts, etc. Once I made a sandwich with ham for lunch to take it with me to Lido, I went from the room in the theater to the rehearsal. When I returned to get ready for the beach, my sandwich was gone. I found the bread on the floor but the meat was gone. There was a cat roaming in the theater and I knew she grabbed my sandwich. She was the opera pet, very few cats were around in Italy after the war. It seems that people ate them. A very good delicacy were rabbits, and cats meat they say is very similar to the rabbit meat. This cat was alive and ate my sandwich.

We were performing for at least 6 weeks in Venice then we were asked to go to another town called Gradiska near the Yugoslav border. There were also performed for the allied armies. I didn't think too much about the future but deep down I knew I didn't want to go back to Yugoslavia. As much as I missed Zagreb, my life in my native city, in the beginning when we first left, I was homesick for many months, now I felt like I don't belong anymore. The Croatian people aside from a few of our Gentile friends were terrible to Jews and I didn't feel like going back.

Some of the Yugoslav refugees were getting ready to return to their homes. Most of them decided against it. Nada wanted to go back for whatever reason, I guess mostly to find our apartment and to see maybe somebody did survive. I made up my mind to stay in Italy and mother decided to stay with me. So one day we took Nada to the train station in Milano. There was a large group of Yugoslavs returning. It was organized by the Yugoslav government. Mother was of course upset, again there was another parting, another saying goodbye. Little did we know that the next time I will see Nada was at mother's deathbed. But this will come later.

When I was still dancing in Venice, a lot of refugees arrived from all over, from camps in Switzerland, people we knew from Zagreb came from Auschwitz and other concentration camps. They were in transit to who knows where, they had no money, no place to stay. Mother took several into our apartment, fed them and usually after a week they left.

One of these people that stayed with mother was a young man, who was in Switzerland from 1943 until the end of the war. His name was George Shotten. Mother knew his family from Zagreb and was friendly with his mother. He came back from the Swiss camp, previously he lived in Milano under false documents. He had no place to live and mother took him in. When she wrote to me that he is staying with her I wrote back and told her she should stop taking people into our apartment.

My engagement in Gradioca was coming to an end. It was a marvelous season of operas, we all had a wonderful time. I came back to Milano. It was the end of August. Mother was happy to see me again. I was in the apartment for one day, the next day in the evening the bell ran. I went to the door. There was a woman and a man standing. The man said he is a friend of the lady, she was just released from prison, found not guilty of any war crime, this was her apartment, and she wanted to come in. I let her in, I felt I had no right to refuse her. She told us she was innocent, they couldn't prove anything about her being a fascist. We made an agreement that we will sleep in her bedroom and she will use the living room and sleep on the couch. We were using the kitchen when we needed to cook and the bathroom we shared. With my luck, this had to happen. I couldn't enjoy the apartment more than 1 day. She was a seamstress by profession and after a few days she started to work again. She had 2 girls that helped her sewing. The living room was always full with materials, women who came to try on the dresses she was seeing. We were out of the house a lot, but the situation wasn't that pleasant anymore. We tried

to be pleasant to each other, but I really could understand that she wasn't too happy having an unknown family in her house.

With Nada gone, there were just the 2 of us. I made a nice sum of money on my last quite long engagement. I was trying to save as much as I was being very fugal and not buying much in Venice. I guess all these years of not having enough money even to buy enough food made me watch what to spend for. When I came back to Milano I had a few dresses or outfits made by a dressmaker. At that time you didn't have in Europe ready cloth only in a few expensive boutiques. Everybody had a dressmaker. You bought the material, then you looked in the special magazines for the style you wanted and the dressmaker made it for you. I took some Ballet classes and went with mother to the center of Milano, where all the surviving refugees met.

One afternoon we were sitting in the coffeehouse when a young man came to our table. This was the same guy who stayed with mother when I was dancing in Venice. It was to be your father and grandfather. I don't remember exactly what happened at our first encounter, but I guess we liked each other. We started to date, I think it was pretty casual, he lived with a friend, Davor Bajd (?), who got married to an Italian girl by the name of Liana Ballo. The Ballos were a very prominent and wealthy family. Her Uncle Italo Ballo was a very prominent Italian politician who died in a plane crash during the war. BAJDO

I became very friendly with Liana, she was pregnant and sick all the time. Her family wasn't too thrilled that she married a Yugoslav refugee and a Jew. Plus he was a painter, an artist, not a house painter and wasn't successful financially.

Then, one day, mother became ill. She had terrible pains in her intestines, was not able to eat. The doctor came. At that time, doctors made house visits. He gave her some medicine that helped her for a while. After a few weeks the pain started again and the doctor said I should take her to the hospital. Here I was again without much money, only with the savings that I brought back from Venice's engagement, alone, Nada being in Yugoslavia.

The hospital I took her to was called Ospedale Majore. It was a modern hospital run by catholic nuns. It was about half and hour by train from Milano. The catholic sisters and doctors were wonderful, never asked me for any payments, they were considerate, hard working and treated mother and myself with love. I guess they knew in a way that we just survived the war, even if we never talked about it. The mother superior, the head of the catholic nuns, was always there to talk to me and cheer me up. The doctors made all the tests and told me she has a growth on her intestines and has to be operated.

I had to abandon all the prospects for dancing engagement. I was alone and had to be there for mother. Everyday I went to the hospital as far as I remember I was able to go to the hospital anytime. If there were any assigned visiting hours observed, they were not enforced for me. Some time I even slept in the hospital when mother was in pain or felt lonely. The room had 2 beds and when the second bed was empty, they let me stay overnight. The food in the hospital was like any food in the hospitals all over the world, pretty bad. But it was still shortly after the war and weren't too choosy. Mother ate little so I usually finished the rest. Mother got pretty tired of the hospital food so they let me bring some food that I cooked at home. I wasn't the greatest cook, but I managed. They even let me cook some pasta in the hospital. There was a room with cooking facilities near mother's room and the nurses allowed me to use it. Can you imagine today using a room in a hospital to cook for a patient?

In the meantime, I had other problems. The lady that came back from prison to her apartment of course was trying to get rid of me. From her standpoint, I couldn't blame her. It was a small apartment and she had to work there too. Finally I had to look for other

accommodations. I found a room with cooking facilities and again I picked up the few belongings and moved.

Mother was operated on sometime in October, it was a 6-hour operation, and they removed part of the intestines. She was in pain after the operation and took her several weeks to be able to sit in a chair. At that time the doctors didn't talk to the patient's family or the patient to tell exactly the truth about an illness. I was young and optimistic and was sure she would get better. She looked terrible. She was always a slim person, now after the operation, she looked like a skeleton. I wrote to Nada in Zagreb, she should try to return to Milano, deep down I probably knew that if she wants to see Mother alive, she should come as soon as possible. Also, I needed somebody to share all these problems. Nada tried to leave Yugoslavia but the communist regime didn't give her permission to leave. I wrote all kind of letter about serious sickness, the hospital and doctors wrote letters, but nothing happened and she couldn't leave.

Finally, I spoke to the head surgeon and he told me that the growth was malignant but he still sounded very optimistic about her survival.

Again, the financial situation became a problem. I couldn't work dancing, mostly the jobs were out of Milano. I felt I had to visit mother every day. I got some money from the American Jewish organizations. They were starting to help the holocaust survivors. I got a certain amount every month but it wasn't much and I couldn't pay the rent and food with that money.

A Yugoslav family by the name of Kresic opened a restaurant in Milano where they cooked all Yugoslav dishes. Since there were a lot of refugees in Milano, they were successful. They were looking for a waitress and asked me if I would work for them. It was very convenient for me. The hours were at lunch for about 3 hours and again in the evening for 3 hours. This way I had plenty of time to go to the hospital every day and look after mother.

I got several offers to dance and hated to refuse since my priority was to take care of mother. She was waiting for me anxiously and was so happy to see me. She went for radiation for the tumor and was very sick after the treatment. I didn't tell her in the beginning that I was working as a waitress. That would have upset her very much. No nice girl from a nice family would work in such a job. This was Europe, 1945; being a waitress was for lower class people, but then no nice Jewish girl was a dancer either. So I guess I was ahead of the times.

My job wasn't very exciting but the food was good. I got lunch and dinner every day and a lot of good tips from customers. One of the patrons that came for dinner was your father (grandfather). We had a few dates and he usually waited for me to finish the job and took me home. We started to like each other very much and had a lot in common. He just found out that his parents had perished in Aushwitz. They were put into the gas chambers upon arrival. His mother was 49 years old and his father in his early 50s, which was too old to work in the camps. So we were two lonely people with so much sadness and we needed each other for support. Also, the chemistry was right. I had a lot of boyfriends through the war years. I really couldn't warm up to any of them. I wasn't ready for anything serious. This was the first time I felt good being kissed by somebody. I was almost 22 years old. The other guys that I dated didn't "turn me on" like you would say now.

I had my waitressing job and daily visits to the hospital and life just went on. I was offered a dancing engagement somewhere; one of my friends said I should go and she will visit mother in the hospital every day. I did go for a long weekend but returned quickly. I was very nervous about leaving mother, and I knew she would miss me terribly.

Nada wrote but the chances for her to get a permit to leave communist Yugoslavia were nil to none. Then she met a young Italian who was part of the Zagreb opera orchestra. He was a

cello player. It was love at first sight. They decided to get married. This way through him she became an Italian citizen, obtained an Italian passport, and was able to travel to Italy. I believe she came to Milano in the beginning of February 1946. I was glad to have her with me so we could share the hospital visit and console each other. Mother was also happy to see Nada although she was failing rapidly. She was only skin and bone. She couldn't eat anymore and about 3 weeks after Nada arrived, she died on February 24th, 1946. She was 54 years old. Mother knew that we would get married eventually. In the hospital, in the real old fashioned way, your father asked for permission to marry me. Mother was very happy. She knew the whole Shotten family well and she figured that I would probably be alone soon and I would be taken care of. She blessed us both in real Jewish blessing and maybe part of our harmony and love was something to do with her blessing when she was practically on her deathbed.

Again life went on. We were trying to find an apartment, or more likely a room with use of kitchen facilities. It was very hard to find anything. Milano was half destroyed by bombs so the apartments or rooms were very scarce and expensive.

We married on April 4, 1946. We applied for United States visas since George had a sister living in New York. We waited 3 years to be able to enter U.S. as displaced persons. In May of 1949 we arrived in N.Y Harbor with a 9 month daughter Liana.

Like most of the survivors who lost families in the Holocaust we decided to have children as soon as possible. Our second daughter Elaine was born in November 1953, the first American born in our family.

In April of 1996 we celebrated our 50th wedding aniversary with family and friends.

In May of 1999 another celebration was due; 50 years since we arrived in U.S.A.

We are now retired in Florida, in relatively good health and enjoying our twilight years.

Mia Shotten